

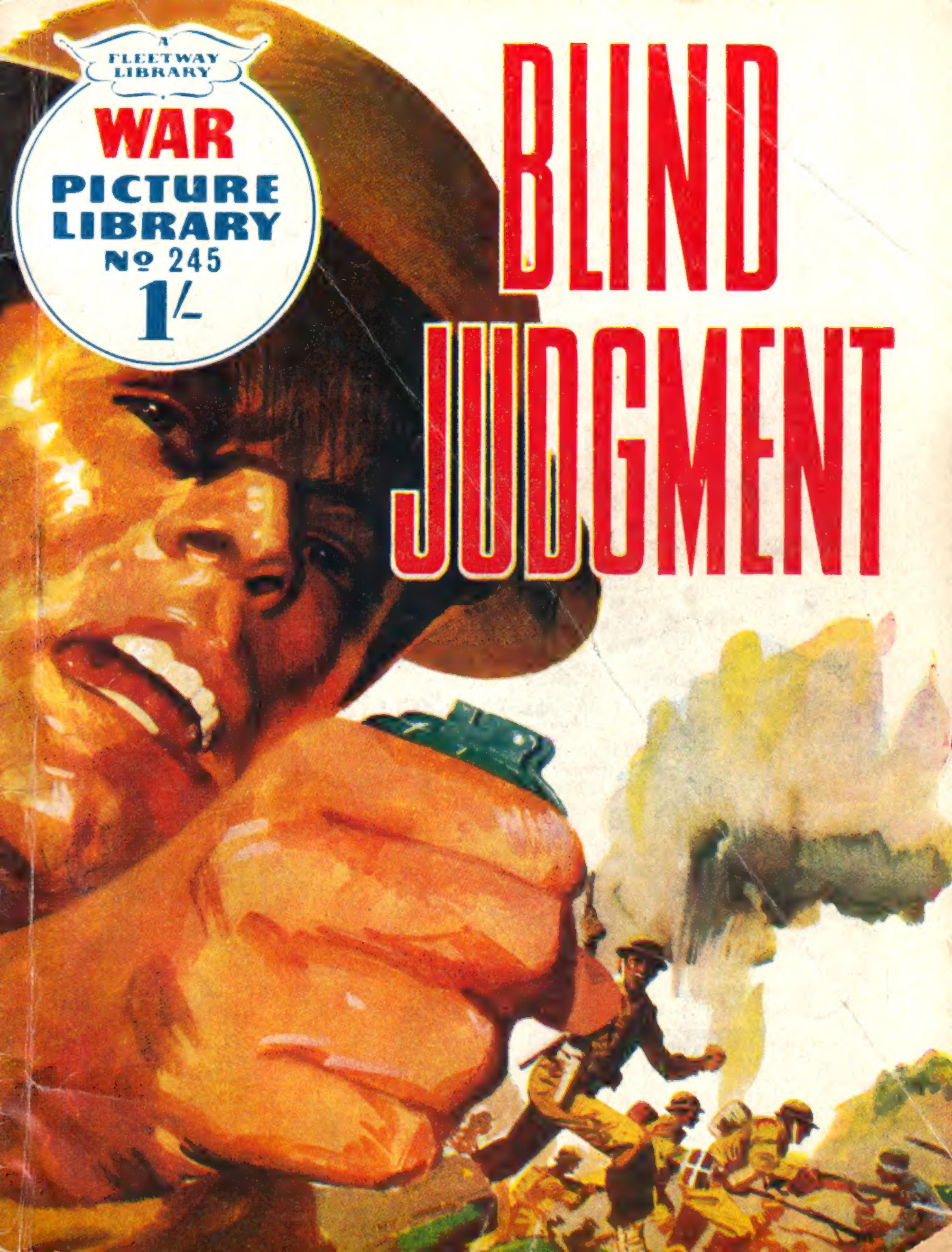
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Lot No. P. 34

BLIND JUDGMENT

IN JUNE, 1942, THE SECOND GERMAN OFFENSIVE IN NORTH AFRICA HAD REACHED ITS FULL MOMENTUM. BEHIND A BATTERING RAM OF 88m.m. ANTI-TANK GUNS, ROMMEL'S PANZER DIVISIONS SURGED FORWARD ACROSS THE ARID PLAINS OF CYRENAICA.

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TOBRUK, THE PORT THAT HAD BECOME A LEGEND OF ENDURANCE DURING ITS LONG AND BITTER SIEGE THE PREVIOUS YEAR, CAPITULATED AFTER ONLY ONE DAY OF FIGHTING. TO THE DESERT VETERANS, IT WAS A CALAMITOUS AND STUNNING BLOW.

Chapter 1. *To The Last Man*

SOUTH-EAST OF EL ADEM, THE 4TH BATTALION NOTTINGHAM FORESTERS WERE DUG IN ALONG A ROCK-STREWN ESCARPMENT DOMINATING ONE OF THE LAST ESCAPE ROUTES TO THE COAST ROAD. AN OPPRESSIVE SILENCE HAD SETTLED ACROSS THE DESERT.



FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, THE C.O., LIEUTENANT-COLONEL STRICKLAND, AND HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, MAJOR JOHN NORDAN, RELAXED AS THEY READ THE MAIL THAT HAD JUST COME UP FROM BRIGADE.



Blind Judgment

5

THERE WAS A LONG ESTABLISHED COMRADESHIP BETWEEN THE TWO MEN WHICH HAD BEEN FORGED ON THE PRE-WAR PARADE GROUNDS OF SANDHURST, AND TEMPERED IN THE FURNACE OF BATTLE.

WELL DONE!
THIS CALLS FOR A
CELEBRATION.

THANKS, TOM.
I MUST ADMIT I'M
RATHER PLEASED...

STAFF CAR
COMING UP, SIR.
LOOKS LIKE THE
BRIGADIER.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, BRIGADIER MASTERSON ENTERED THE HEADQUARTERS. THERE WAS A BITTER WEARINESS IN HIS VOICE.

NO USE BURYING OUR HEADS
IN THE SAND. BEST PART OF OUR
ARMOUR'S BREWED UP THIS SIDE
OF GAZALA AND THE FRONT'S
CRACKED WIDE OPEN. PERHAPS
YOU'VE GUESSED THE REASON
WHY I'M HERE, TOM?

I THINK SO, SIR.
WE'RE SITTING RIGHT
IN JERRY'S PATH.

Blind Judgment

ONLY THE SLIGHT TWITCHING AROUND HIS EYES BETRAYED WHAT IT COST THE BRIGADIER TO UTTER HIS NEXT WORDS.



NIGHT SPREAD ITS MANTLE ACROSS THE RIDGE, AND THE BATTALION SETTLED TO WAIT WITH STOIC CALM.



Blind Judgment

7

A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, GERMAN ASSAULT ENGINEERS HAD COMPLETED AN INFILTRATION INTO THE BARBED WIRE ENTANGLEMENTS AND MINEFIELDS THAT GUARDED THE BATTALION PERIMETER.



SUDDENLY, THE FRONT ERUPTED IN A SERIES OF SAVAGE EXPLOSIONS AS THE T.N.T. CHARGES MINGLED WITH THE ROAR OF EXPLODING MINES.



Blind Judgment

IN THEIR FORWARD POSITION, BAKER COMPANY TOOK THE INITIAL SHOCK OF THE ATTACK.

SMACK ANOTHER MAG ON, HARRY. IF JERRY THINKS HE'S GOING TO GET UP HERE THAT EASY, HE'S DEAD OUT O'LUCK.

PROPER DEATH-OR-GLORY BUNCH, AIN'T THEY?



WITH HIS USUAL TOTAL DISREGARD FOR PERSONAL SAFETY, COLONEL STRICKLAND MOVED CALMLY AMIDST THE INFERNO AROUND HIM.



Blind Judgment

9

THE ACCURATE FIRE FROM THE BRITISH BATTALION TOOK A DEADLY TOLL THAT EVEN THE VAUNTED JAEGER REGIMENT COULD NOT FACE.



THE HEAVY THUMP OF MULTI-BARRELLED MORTARS ADDED THEIR GRIM NOTE TO THE STACCATO CHORUS OF SMALL ARMS FIRE.



Blind Judgment

THE MORTAR BOMBS BURST WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT AMID THE BRITISH POSITIONS.



COLONEL STRICKLAND TRIED TO RISE BUT A SEARING PAIN LANCED THROUGH HIS LEG FORCING A GROAN FROM BETWEEN HIS CLENCHED TEETH.

EASY NOW, TOM-EASY.



YOU'RE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, SIR.

THEN THE MORPHINE TOOK EFFECT AND MERCIFUL OBLIVION CLOSED AROUND HIM.

HOW'S HE GOING TO MAKE OUT, DOC?

HARD TO SAY, HE'S STOPPED A NASTY CHUNK OF SHRAPNEL IN THE LEG. IT'S ONLY AN OPERATING THEATRE THAT CAN SAVE HIS LEG.



Blind Judgment

11

THE BOMBARDMENT CONTINUED WITH UNABATED FURY AS MAJOR NORDAN MADE HIS WAY TO THE BATTALION HEADQUARTERS.



IF TOM STAYS HERE, IT'S EITHER PERMANENTLY OR TO END UP IN A P.O.W. CAMP. THE ARMY CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE MEN OF HIS CALIBRE AND EXPERIENCE.

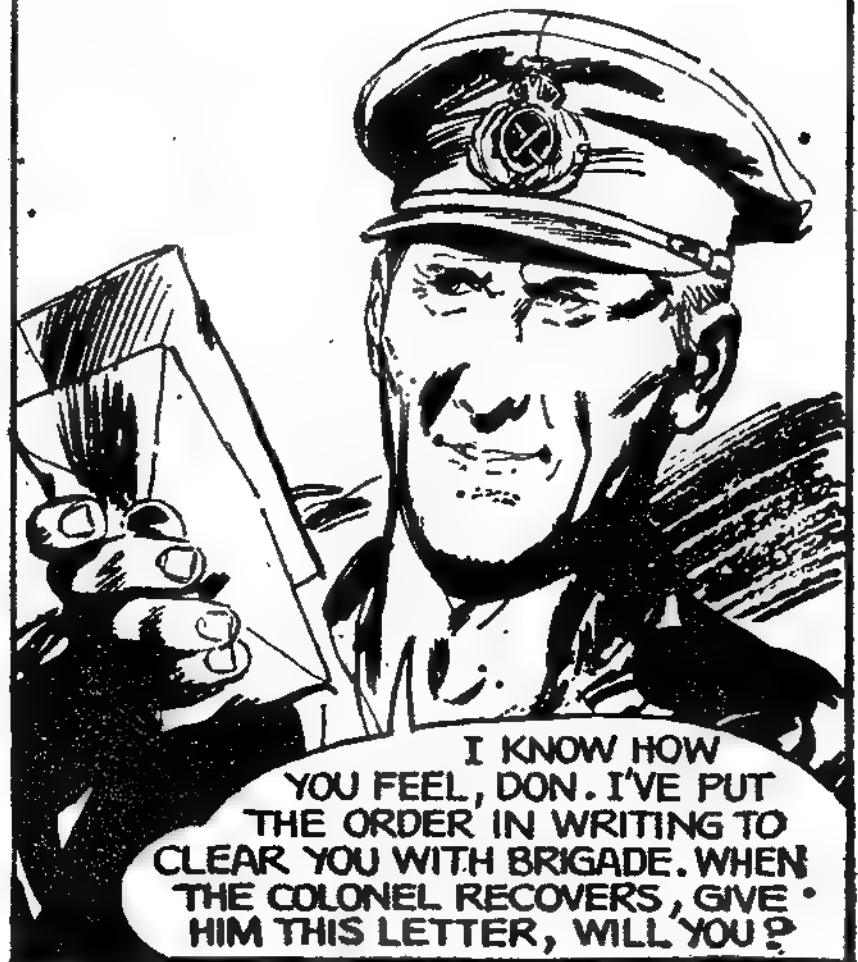
CAPTAIN DONALD RITCHIE, THE ADJUTANT, HAD BEEN WITH THE BATTALION SINCE THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

THE OLD MAN'S STOPPED A PACKET, DON. I WANT YOU TO GET HIM BACK TO ALEX, PRONTO.



RELIEVE HIM OF COMMAND IN THE MIDDLE OF BATTLE! HE'D NEVER FORGIVE YOU, JOHN. BESIDES, I'M DARNED IF I WANT TO GO MYSELF JUST NOW.

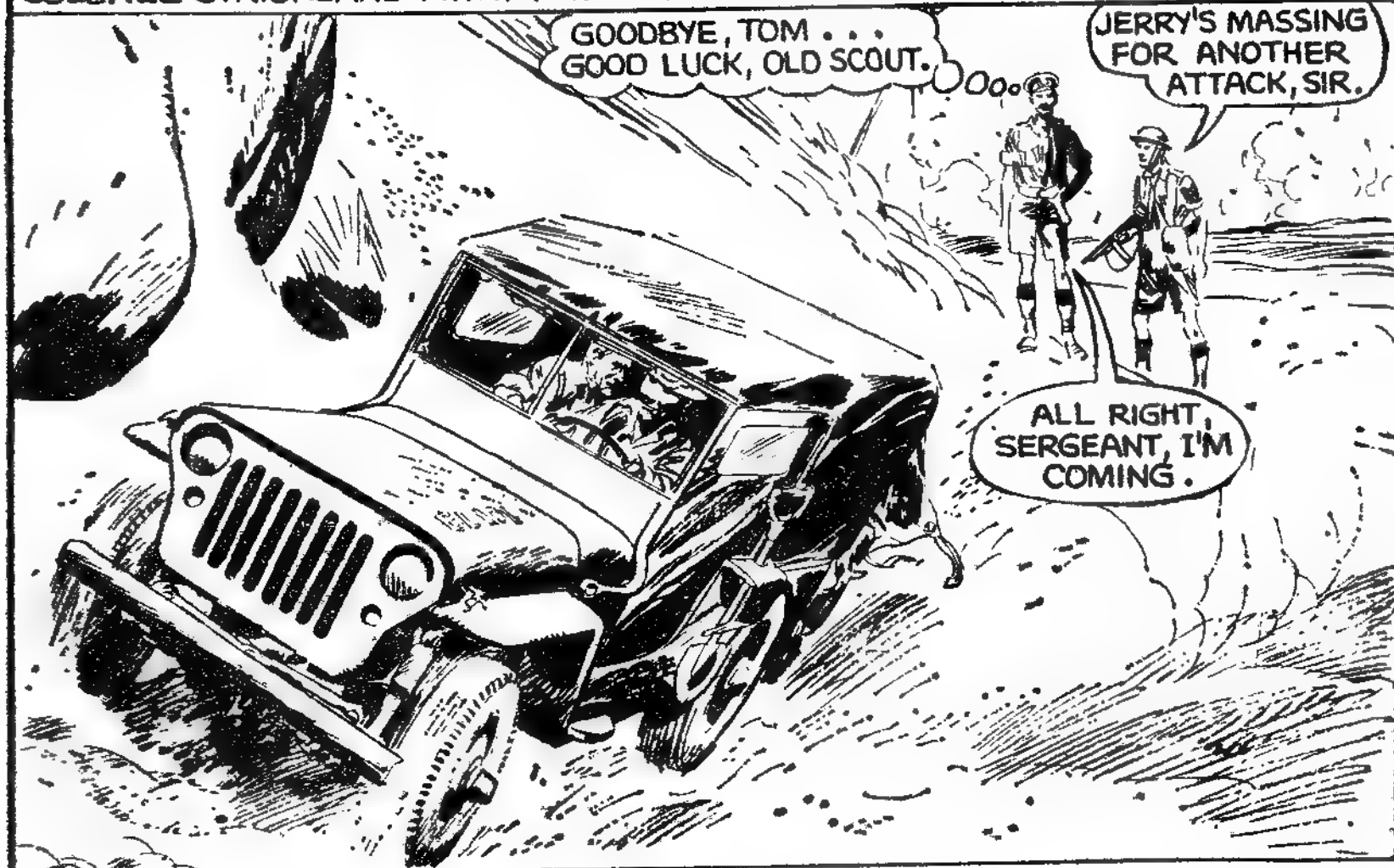
THE MAJOR'S VOICE WAS QUIET, BUT IT HELD A FIRM RING OF AUTHORITY.



I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL, DON. I'VE PUT THE ORDER IN WRITING TO CLEAR YOU WITH BRIGADE. WHEN THE COLONEL RECOVERS, GIVE HIM THIS LETTER, WILL YOU?

Blind Judgment

TEN MINUTES LATER, A JEEP BUCKETED AWAY TOWARDS THE REAR, TAKING COLONEL STRICKLAND AWAY FROM HIS COMMAND.



THREE TIMES DURING THE LONG HOURS OF THE NIGHT THE GERMANS SWEEPED FORWARD IN FRENZIED ATTEMPTS TO TAKE THE RIDGE.



Blind Judgment

13

BUT AFTER EACH ATTACK, A FEW MORE WEAPON PITS WERE SILENT. EVERYWHERE GREY-FACED MEN SLUMPED DOWN, EXHAUSTED, OVER THEIR GUNS.



THE FIRST PALE TINGE OF DAWN COLOURED THE EASTERN SKY, AND ALL THAT REMAINED OF THE FOURTH BATTALION WAS STILL ON THE RIDGE.



Blind Judgment

THE FINAL ATTACK CAME IN AN OVERWHELMING WAVE OF STORM TROOPERS, SUPPORTED BY THE PONDEROUS WEIGHT OF PANZERS.



TEN MINUTES LATER, THE FOURTH BATTALION HAD CEASED TO EXIST.

THE RIDGE IS OURS, HERR OBERST. THERE WERE NO PRISONERS.

YES, IT IS OURS — BUT THE PRICE WAS HIGH. THE ENGLANDERS WERE WORTHY OPPONENTS INDEED.



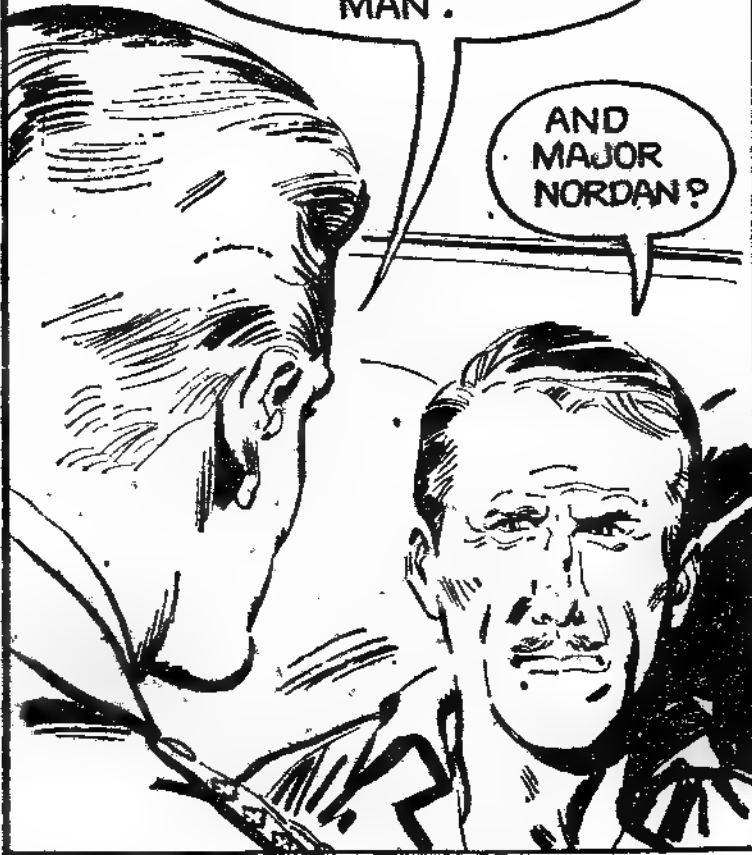


Blind Judgment

CAPTAIN RITCHIE FOUND IT HARD TO MEET THE COLONEL'S GAZE. WHEN HE ANSWERED HIS VOICE WAS LOW.

THEY OBEYED THE ORDER, SIR — THE RIDGE WAS HELD TO THE LAST MAN.

AND MAJOR NORDAN?

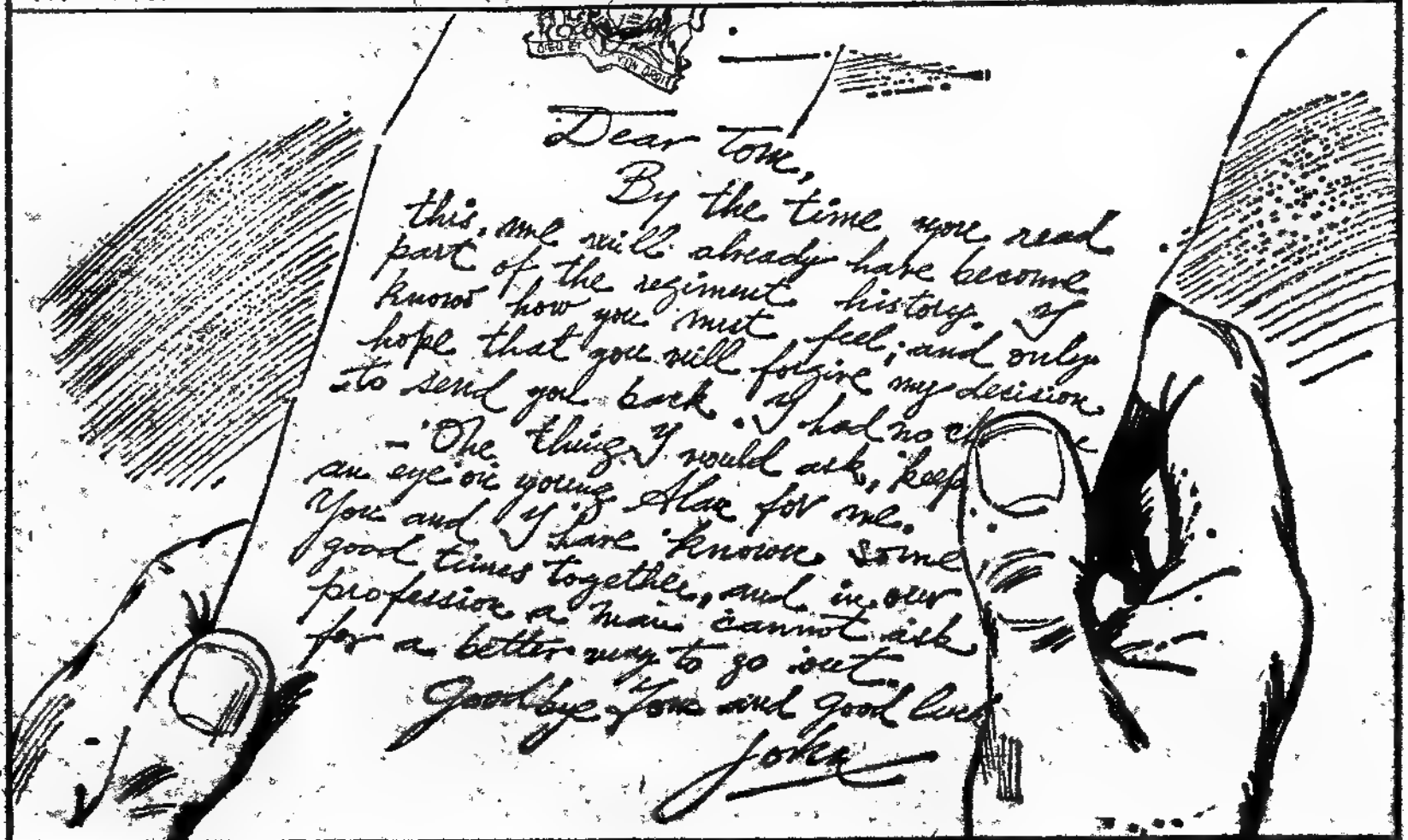


HE — HE DIED WITH THE MEN, SIR. BEFORE WE LEFT, HE ASKED ME TO GIVE YOU THIS.

I SEE — THANK YOU.

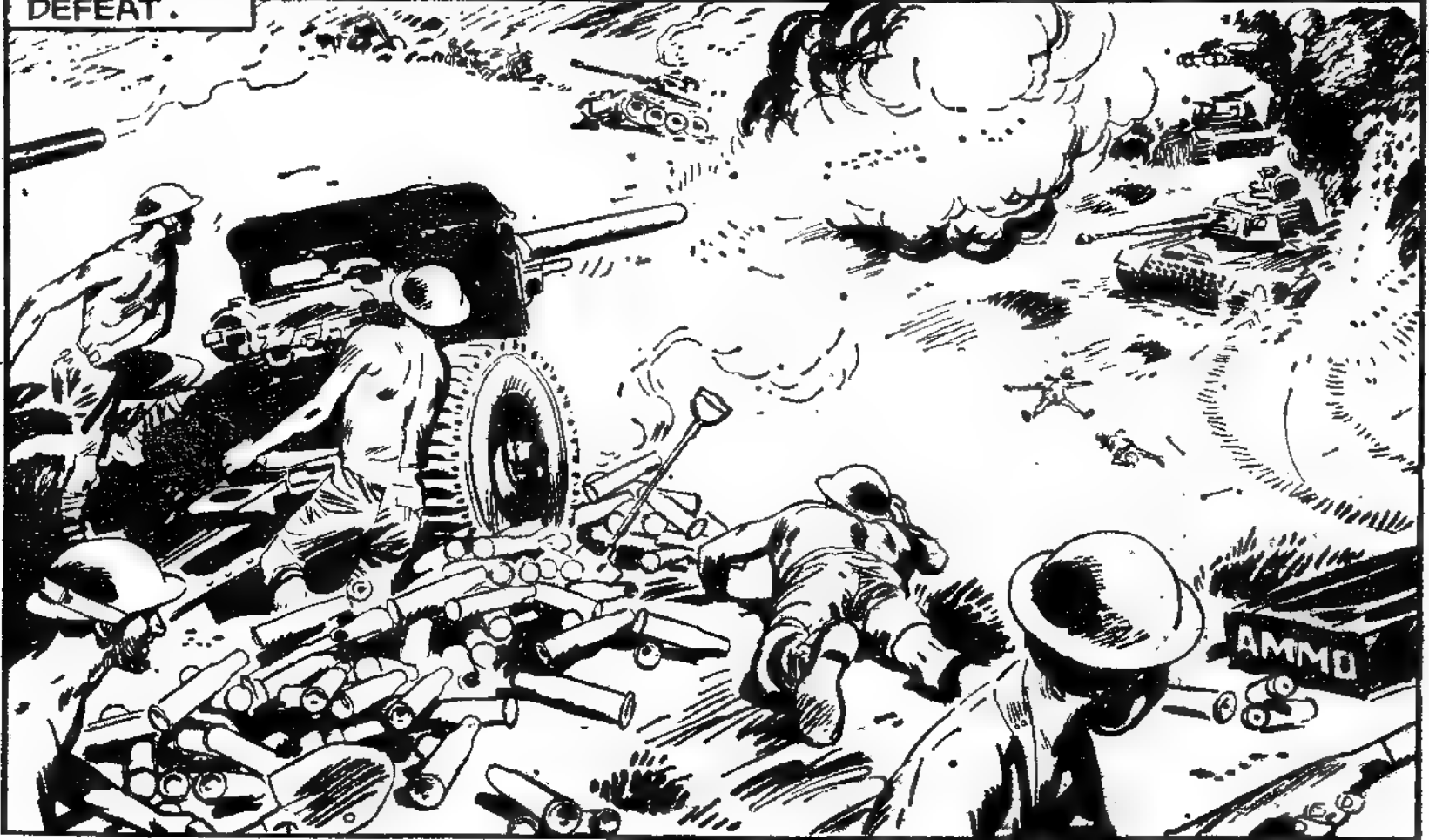


AS THE COLONEL READ THE HASTILY SCRAWLED NOTE, HE COULD ALMOST HEAR THE WELL-KNOWN VOICE OF HIS OLD COMRADE.



Chapter 2. Debt of Honour

DURING COLONEL STRICKLAND'S TWO MONTHS CONVALESCENCE, THE GREAT OFFENSIVE OF THE AFRIKA KORPS GROUND TO A HALT. AT THE BATTLE OF ALAM HALFA, THE ONCE INVINCIBLE PANZER DIVISIONS TASTED THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT.



BY THE MIDDLE OF SEPTEMBER, THE 8TH ARMY WAS GATHERING STRENGTH TO START PUSHING THE GERMANS BACK. AMONG THE MANY UNITS RE-FORMED WAS THE 4TH BATTALION FORESTERS... WITH COLONEL STRICKLAND AS THEIR C.O.



GOOD TO SEE YOU BACK ..
IN HARNESS, TOM. YOUR NEW
BATTALION IS A MIXED BUNCH; BUT
RITCHIE'S GOT HIS CROWN, SO YOU'LL
HAVE A GOOD TWO I/C. TO HELP
LICK THEM INTO SHAPE.

THANK YOU,
SIR. IT FEELS
GOOD TO BE
BACK.

Blind Judgment

IN COMPANY WITH HIS NEW SECOND-IN-COMMAND, THE COLONEL MADE HIS WAY TO THE BATTALION LINES.

BETWEEN US, DON, WE'LL TURN THESE LADS INTO THE BEST BATTALION IN THE BRIGADE. THERE'S A GOOD HARDCORE OF VETERANS AMONG THEM.

BY THE WAY, SIR, I'VE WANGLED THE TRANSFER YOU WANTED FOR YOUNG ALAN NORDAN...



LATER THAT AFTERNOON, THE LATE MAJOR NORDAN'S SON ARRIVED...

THE C.O. WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU AT ONCE, MISTER NORDAN.

THANK YOU, SERGEANT.



THE STRIKING RESEMBLANCE OF THE YOUNG OFFICER TO HIS FATHER STABBED AT THE COLONEL LIKE A KNIFE.

LIEUTENANT NORDAN,
SIR — I WAS TOLD TO
REPORT TO
YOU.

WELCOME TO THE
BATTALION, NORDAN.
I'M POSTING YOU TO
'B' COMPANY. MEET
YOUR COMPANY
COMMANDER,
CAPTAIN BEWLEY...



I'LL LOOK AFTER
HIM, JOHN —
I PROMISE.

COME ON OVER
TO THE MESS AND
WE'LL GET YOU
SETTLED IN.



Blind Judgment

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THE BATTALION TRAINED HARD. FOR THE GREENHORNS FRESH OUT FROM ENGLAND IT WAS THE FIRST TASTE OF THE GRIM REALITY OF THE DESERT.



SLOWLY THE BATTALION BECAME DESERT-HARDENED AND MOULDED INTO AN AGGRESSIVE FIGHTING UNIT.



BUT THE TIME ALLOTTED TO TRAINING WAS SHORT.

THIS IS THE MOMENT WE HAVE TRAINED FOR. I KNOW YOU WILL ACQUIT YOURSELVES WELL AND MAINTAIN THE GREAT TRADITIONS OF THIS REGIMENT.



THREE DAYS LATER, THE 4th BATTALION WAS IN THE NEAREST PLACE TO A FRONT LINE THAT THE VAST BARREN DESERT WOULD ALLOW.

BRIGADE WANTS TO KNOW IF JERRY IS STILL OCCUPYING EL DURBAR. YOU'LL LEAD 'B' COMPANY ON A FIGHTING PATROL TO FIND OUT. DON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES THOUGH.

RIGHT, SIR.



AS 'B' COMPANY MOVED OFF, COLONEL STRICKLAND AND MAJOR RITCHIE WATCHED THEM GO.

YOUNG NORDAN'S EAGER, BUT HE'LL LEARN. JUST LIKE WE ALL HAVE.

HE'LL MAKE THE GRADE. THAT LAD IS GOING TO MAKE A FIRST-CLASS OFFICER, COMES FROM THE RIGHT STOCK.



Blind Judgment

FOR AN HOUR THE COMPANY ADVANCED CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH THE DESOLATION OF NO MAN'S LAND. AT LAST, CAPTAIN BEWLEY HALTED THE COLUMN...

EL DUBAR LAYS IN 'A WADI JUST OVER THE NEXT RIDGE. COME ON, ALAN, WE'LL GET FORWARD AND TAKE A QUIET SHUFTI.



THE TWO OFFICERS CLIMBED TO THE SUMMIT OF THE SUN-BAKED RIDGE. FOR SEVERAL MINUTES THE CAPTAIN SEARCHED EXHAUSTIVELY WITH HIS GLASSES, THEN HE GAVE A GROWL OF SATISFACTION.

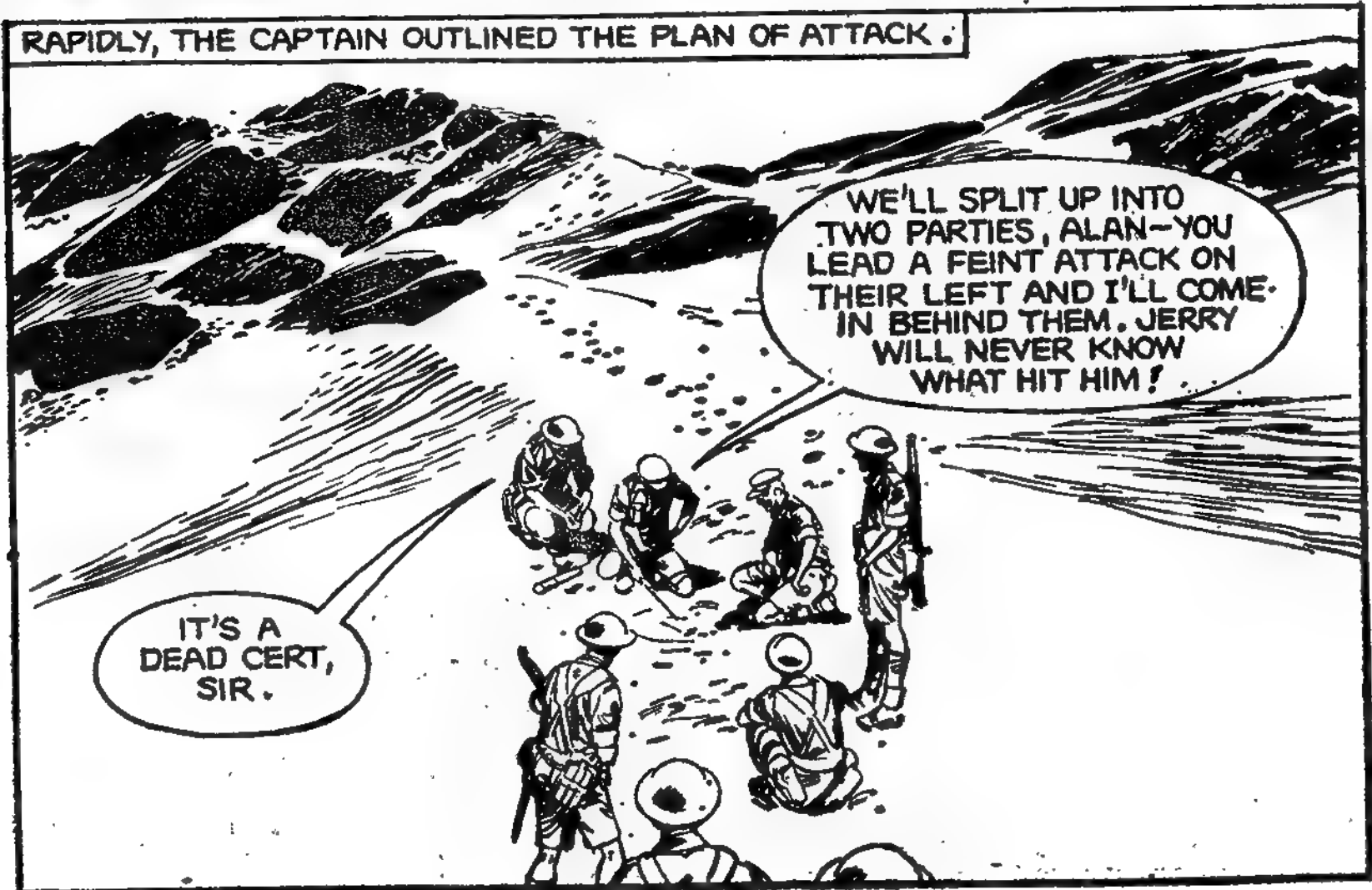
WE'RE IN LUCK, OLD SON. THAT'S A JERRY SUPPLY COLUMN LEAGUED IN THE TOWN. IF WE PLAY OUR CARDS RIGHT THEY'RE AS GOOD AS IN THE BAG. HERE, TAKE A LOOK YOURSELF.



IMPRUDENTLY FOR ONCE, THE GERMANS HAD TAKEN LITTLE PRECAUTION AGAINST SURPRISE ATTACK.



RAPIDLY, THE CAPTAIN OUTLINED THE PLAN OF ATTACK.



WE'LL SPLIT UP INTO TWO PARTIES, ALAN—YOU LEAD A FEINT ATTACK ON THEIR LEFT AND I'LL COME IN BEHIND THEM. JERRY WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT HIT HIM!

IT'S A DEAD CERT, SIR.

Blind Judgment

WATCHES WERE SYNCHRONISED. THE MAIN PARTY MOVED OFF AND ALAN WAITED TENSELY AS THE MINUTES TICKED SLOWLY AWAY.



THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT'S HAND DROPPED. THE LONG-TUBED MORTARS PUNCHED SMOKE BOMBS SKYWARD.



WITH HEART RACING, ALAN NORDAN LEAPT TO HIS FEET. THIS WAS THE CULMINATING MOMENT OF HIS TRAINING. AT LAST HE WAS LEADING MEN INTO ACTION.



AS CAPTAIN BEWLEY HAD ANTICIPATED, THE SUDDEN ATTACK CAUGHT THE GERMANS COMPLETELY OFF GUARD.



NUMBER ONE PLATOON PLUNGED HEADLONG INTO THE SMOKE. BEHIND THEM, THE MORTARS HAD SWITCHED TO H.E. AND THE HEAVY CRUMP OF EXPLODING BOMBS MINGLED WITH THE STACCATO RATTLE OF SMALL ARMS FIRE.

BETTER GO TO GROUND, SIR, THIS SMOKE WON'T HOLD UP MUCH LONGER. DON'T FORGET WE'RE JUST THE BAIT.



Blind Judgment

THE BLOOD WAS POUNDING IN THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT'S VEINS, THE LIGHT OF BATTLE BLAZING IN HIS EYES.



THE GERMANS HAD BEEN CAUGHT UNAWARES — BUT THEY WERE QUICK TO RECOVER.



FOR LIEUTENANT NORDAN, THE CRUEL REALITY OF BATTLE CAME WITH A LONG, VICIOUS BURST OF A SPANDAU AS IT REAPED A GRIM HARVEST.

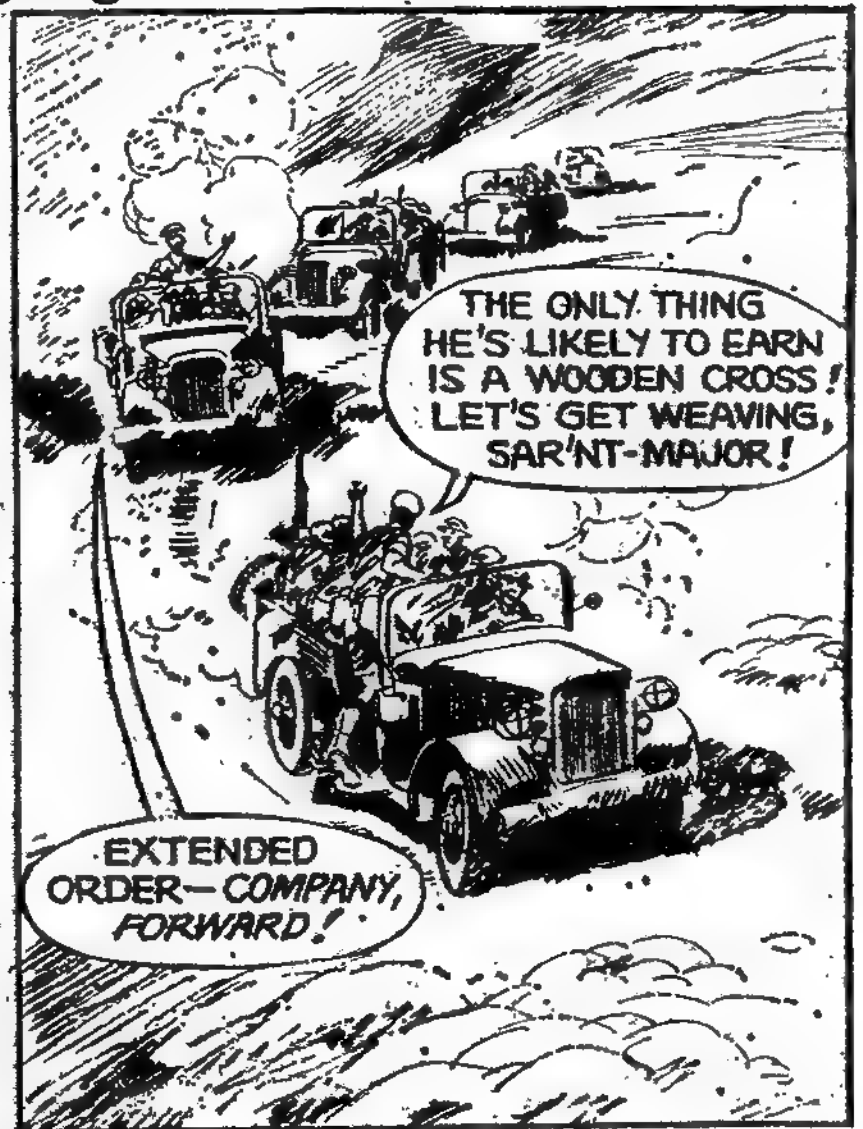


NAILED TO THE GROUND BY THE HAIL OF LEAD THAT SCYTHED THE AIR ABOVE THEM, THE LIEUTENANT COULD ONLY LOOK AROUND AT THE STILL LIFELESS BODIES.



Blind Judgment

CAPTAIN BEWLEY'S TRUCKS SKIDDED TO A HALT ON THE RIDGE JUST IN TIME TO WITNESS NUMBER ONE PLATOON'S DISASTROUS CHARGE:



AT FULL THROTTLE, THE TRUCKS CAREERED DOWN THE SLOPE TOWARDS THE TOWN.



THE ARAB TOWN ECHOED TO THE HARSH RATTLE OF BREN GUNS AND THE SHRILL WHINE OF BULLETS.



GRIM-FACED MEN STALKED FORWARD THROUGH CLOUDS OF DUST AND ACRID CORDITE FUMES.



Blind Judgment

THE SURPRISE WAS COMPLETE. TO THE CONFUSED GERMANS, IT SEEMED THE TOWN WAS FILLED WITH KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES.



PANIC SWEEPED THE GERMAN RANKS LIKE A BRUSH FIRE, AND SOON THE BRITISH WERE IN COMPLETE CONTROL...



THE BARK OF THE LEE-ENFIELD AND THE LUGER RANG OUT SIMULTANEOUSLY BUT THE LAST, DEFIANT GESTURE OF A FANATICAL NAZI FOUND ITS MARK.



FOR CAPTAIN CLIVE BEWLEY, A LONG CAMPAIGN WAS OVER.

THE CAPTAIN'S DEAD, MURDERED...! GET THEM FLAMIN' JERRIES OUT O' MY SIGHT OR I'LL TURN A MACHINE GUN ON 'EM!



MEANWHILE, THE PLATOON SERGEANT TRIED TO COMFORT ALAN NORDAN ...

DON'T LET IT THROW YOU, SIR. SOUNDS LIKE THE FIREWORKS ARE OVER, TIME WE GOT MOVING.



Blind Judgment

THE SERGEANT HELPED THE LIEUTENANT TO HIS FEET AND GUIDED HIM AWAY FROM THE UGLY PATTERN OF WAR SPRAWLED ON THE DESERT.

DON'T LOOK BACK, SIR. THEY'RE GONE, AND THERE'S NOWT WE CAN DO FOR 'EM. IN THIS GAME YOU JUST GOT TO FORGET AND GO ON.



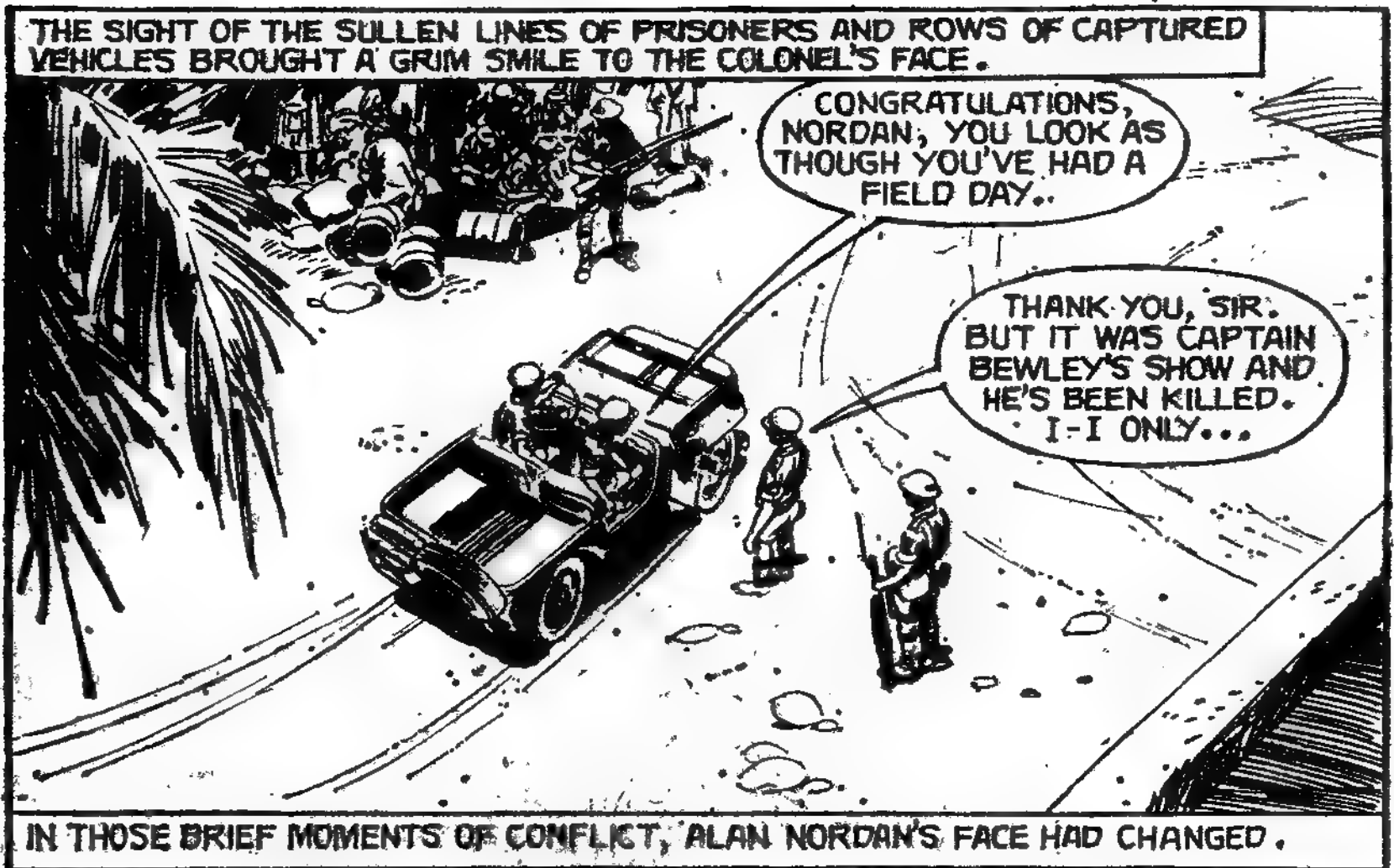
THE PLATOON FILED QUIETLY INTO THE TOWN. STILL DAZED, LIEUTENANT NORDAN COULD HARDLY COMPREHEND THE SERGEANT-MAJOR'S WORDS.

IT'S CAPTAIN BEWLEY, SIR... HE BOUGHT IT RIGHT ON THE LAST KNOCK. HE'S DEAD!

ER-YES, I UNDERSTAND—I'M SORRY.

FIRST TIME UNDER FIRE, SAR'NT-MAJOR. YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES. HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT IN A BIT.





Blind Judgment

THE TRANSFORMATION HAD INCREASED ALAN NORDAN'S STRONG RESEMBLANCE TO HIS DEAD FATHER.

POOR OLD CLIVE, WE'VE LOST A FIRST-CLASS OFFICER. BUT YOU'VE PUT UP A GRAND SHOW, ALAN — A GRAND SHOW.



I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING, SIR. I—I WAS SCARED STIFF.

WE ALL ARE, LAD, BUT THIS WAS YOUR FIRST ACTION...YOUR FATHER WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD OF YOU, MY BOY.



FOR ONCE, COLONEL STRICKLAND'S JUDGMENT WAS WARPED BY SENTIMENT.

MAJOR RITCHIE QUIETLY TOOK THE SERGEANT-MAJOR ASIDE...

TELL ME, SERGEANT-MAJOR, HOW DID YOUNG LIEUTENANT NORDAN SHAPE UP?

WELL ENOUGH, SIR. YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE THE FIRST TIME THE LEAD STARTS FLYING...



ON THE WAY BACK TO HEADQUARTERS, THE COLONEL WAS THOUGHTFULLY SILENT. THEN...

'B' COMPANY WILL NEED A NEW COMMANDER NOW. WE'LL GIVE YOUNG NORDAN A CHANCE. HAVE HIS APPOINTMENT AS ACTING O.C. BAKER COMPANY POSTED IN ORDERS TONIGHT.

ISN'T THAT RATHER ASKING A LOT OF HIM, SIR?



THE COLONEL'S VOICE WAS CURT AND DECISIVE.

I WASN'T ASKING FOR YOUR OPINION, DON, THAT WAS AN ORDER.

VERY GOOD, SIR.

I ONLY HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, COLONEL!



Chapter 3. The Hidden Spark

TWO DAYS LATER, CONFIRMATION OF ALAN NORDAN'S PROMOTION ARRIVED FROM BRIGADE.

YOU'VE A FINE COMPANY FOR YOUR FIRST TASK, ALAN. I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY. GOOD LUCK, MY BOY.

THANK YOU, SIR. I'LL DO MY BEST.



DESPITE HIS OWN MISGIVINGS, THE YOUNG CAPTAIN WAS DESPERATELY EAGER TO JUSTIFY THE COLONEL'S TRUST.

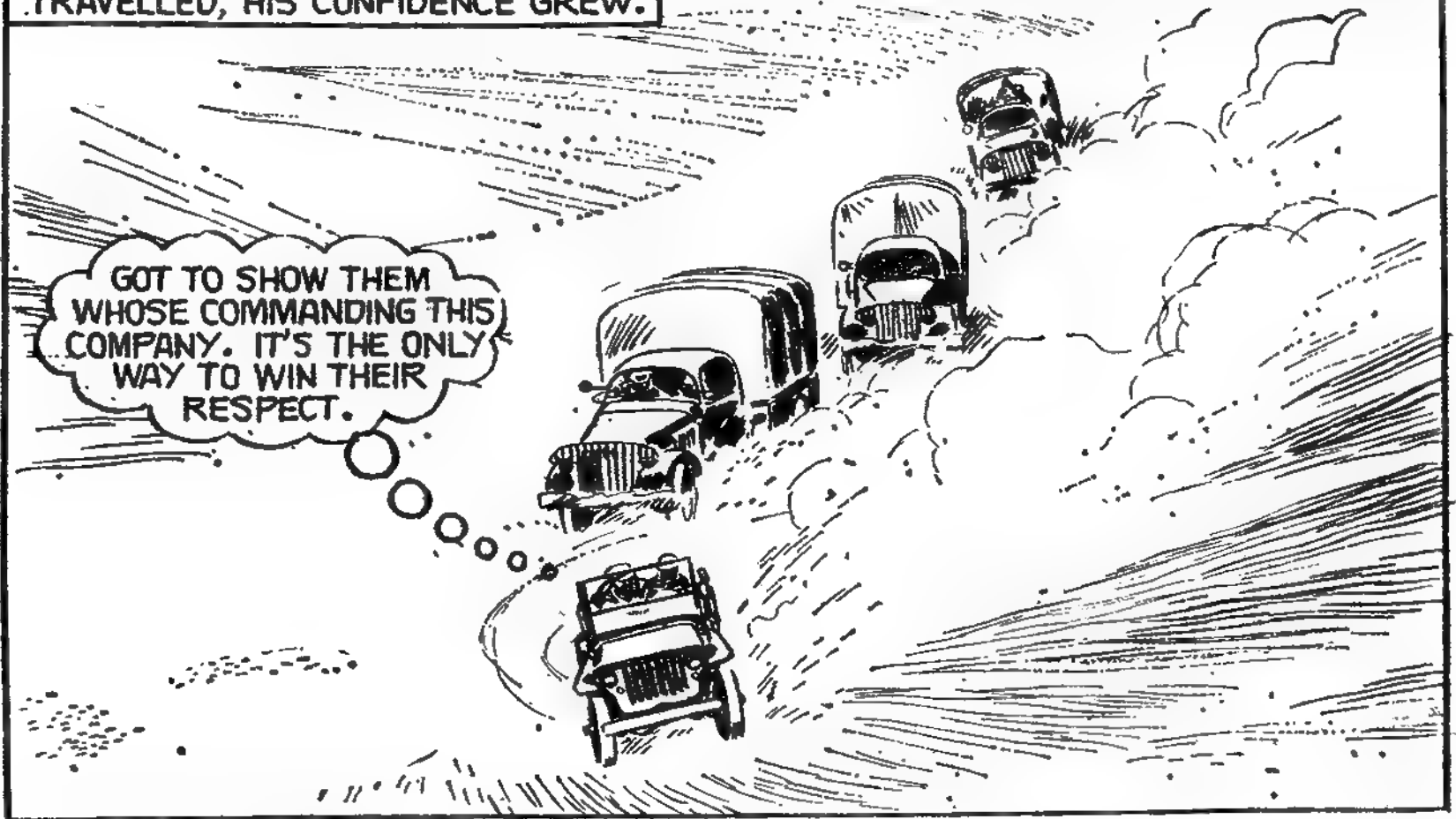
MOUNT UP, MEN, ON THE DOUBLE THERE!

JUST KEEP AN EYE ON HIM, SERGEANT-MAJOR.

LEAVE IT TO ME, SIR.



CAPTAIN NORDAN LED THE COMPANY OUT ON A ROUTINE PATROL ACROSS THE ARID WASTES THAT FORMED THE UNSTABLE FRONT LINE. WITH EACH MILE THEY TRAVELLED, HIS CONFIDENCE GREW.



HIS DRIVER WAS A SEASONED CAMPAIGNER, KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE WAYS OF THE DESERT...



NO, KEEP GOING. WE'VE GOT TO COMPLETE THIS PATROL BY EIGHTEEN HUNDRED HOURS.

SKY'S NOT LOOKING TOO HEALTHY, SIR? SHALL I PULL OVER IN THE LEE OF THEM ROCKS?

IN ONE OF THE REAR TRUCKS, SERGEANT-MAJOR LAWSON GREW INCREASINGLY WORRIED AS THE WIND MOUNTED IN FEROCITY.

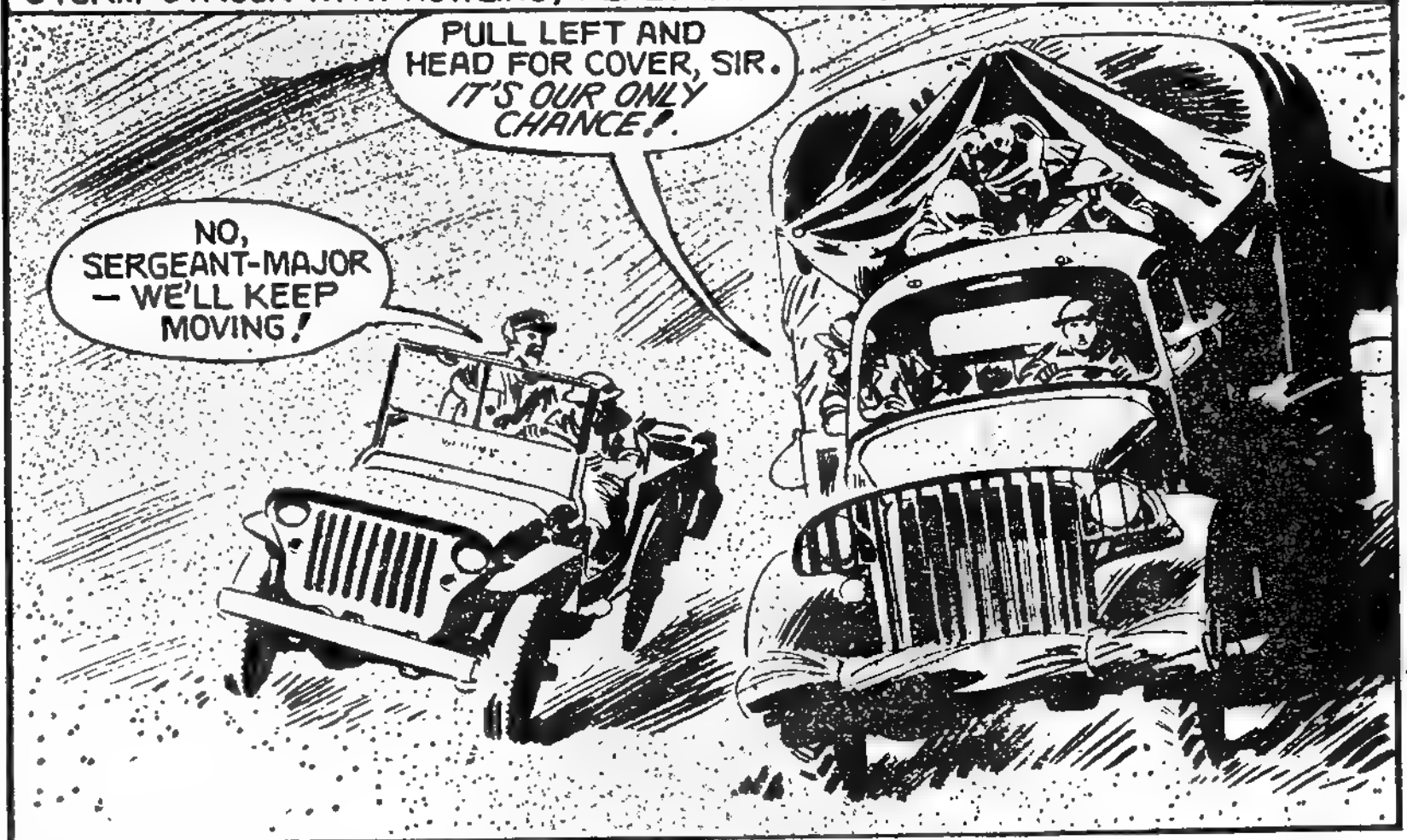


HEAD UP TO THE TOP OF THE CONVOY. GET YOUR TOE DOWN, MAN!

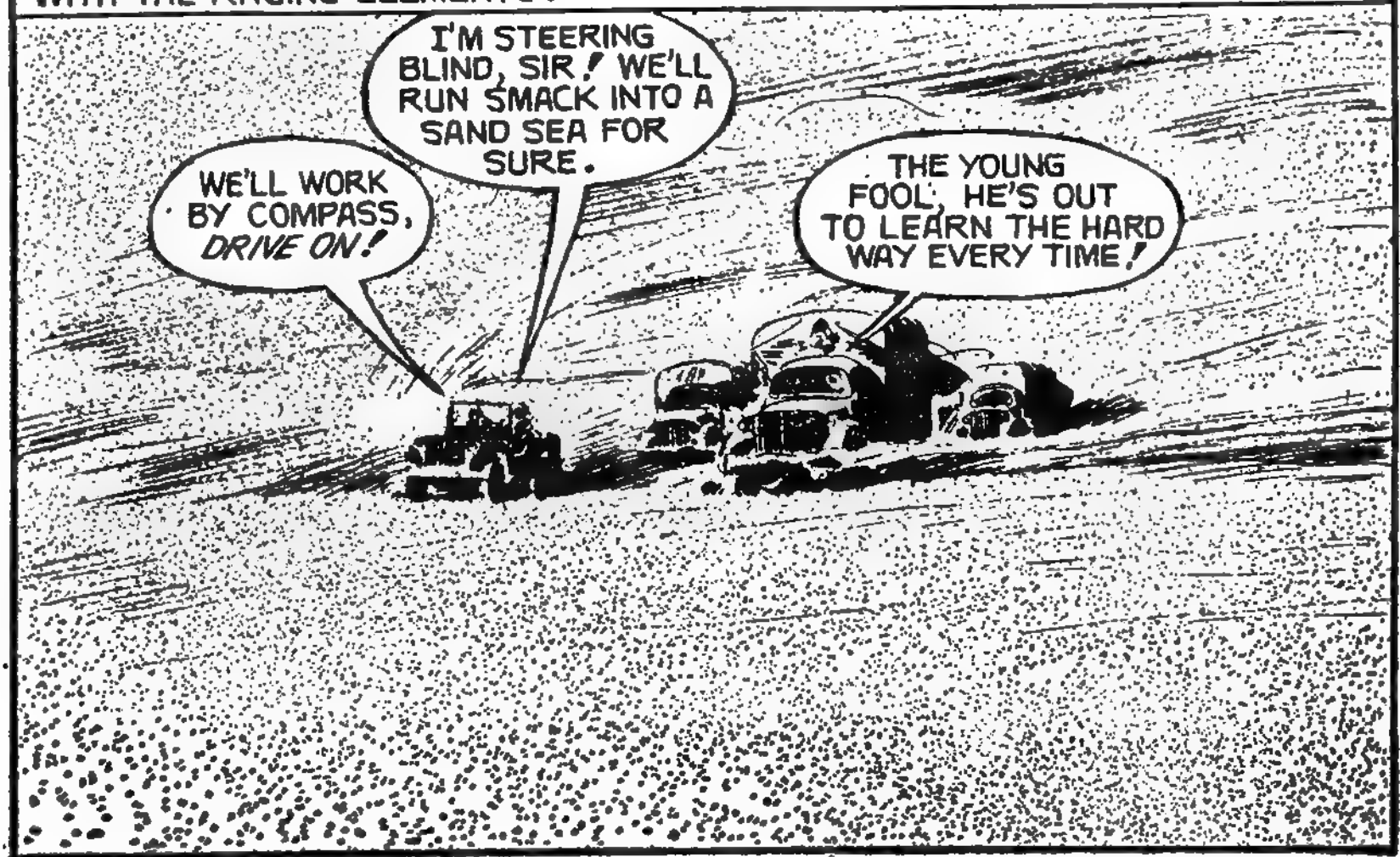
RIGHT, SIR, HANG ON.

Blind Judgment

AS THE SERGEANT-MAJOR'S TRUCK DREW ALONGSIDE THE CAREERING JEEP, THE STORM STRUCK WITH HOWLING, PENETRATING VICIOUSNESS...



FOR FIVE MINUTES, THE LINE OF VEHICLES KEPT UP AN UNEQUAL STRUGGLE WITH THE RAGING ELEMENTS.



THEN THE INEVITABLE HAPPENED. DESPITE ALL THE DRIVER'S SKILL, THE JEEP TIPPED VIOLENTLY OVER IN THE SOFT, TREACHEROUS SAND.



ONCE BOGGED DOWN THERE WAS LITTLE THE MEN COULD DO BUT SEEK WHAT SHELTER THEY COULD AND WAIT FOR THE STORM TO PASS.



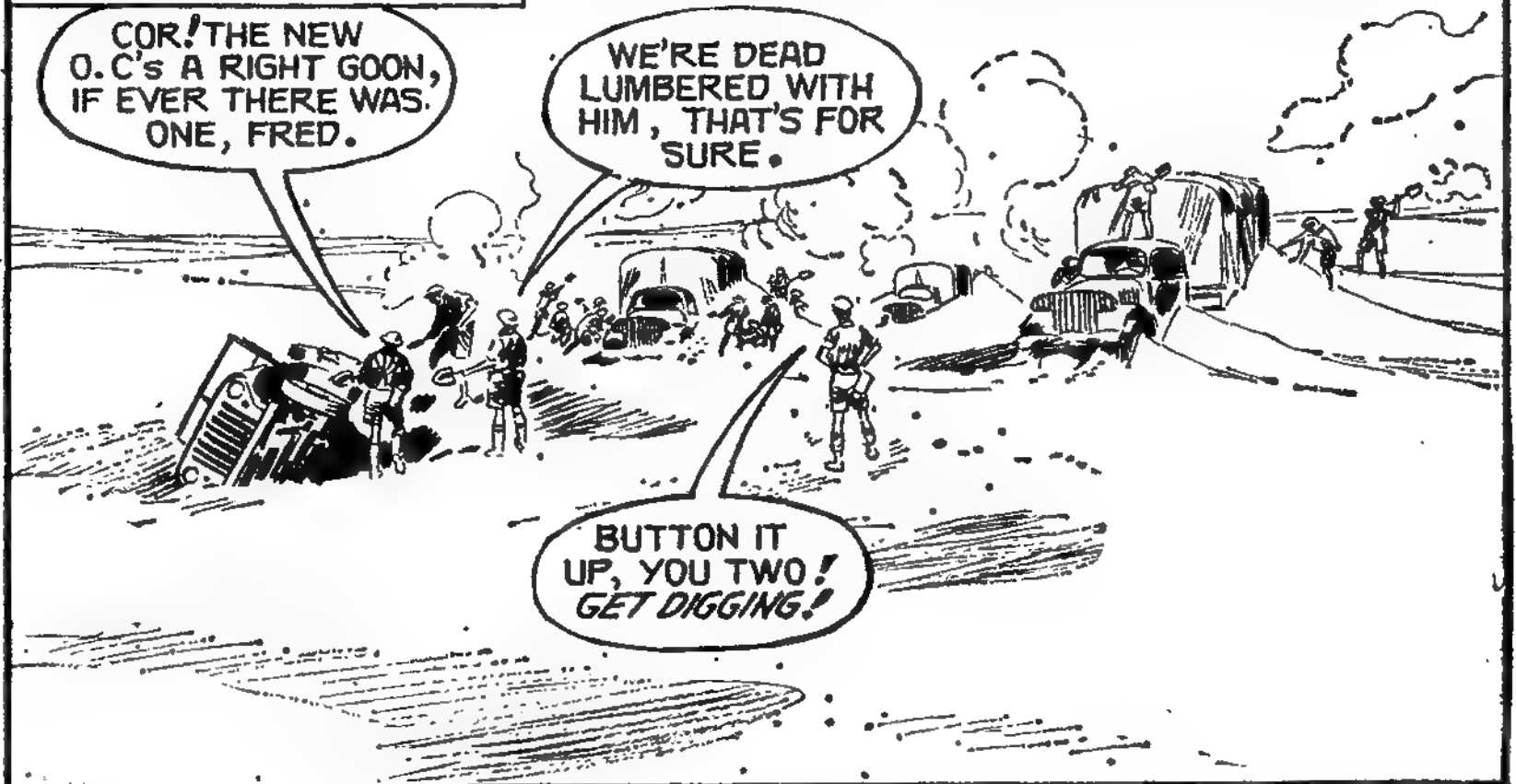
Blind Judgment

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE STORM ABATED. WITH EYES AND NOSTRILS HALF CLOGGED WITH SAND, CURSING MEN SET ABOUT THE BACK-BREAKING TASK OF DIGGING OUT THE TRUCKS.

COR! THE NEW
O.C.'S A RIGHT GOON,
IF EVER THERE WAS
ONE, FRED.

WE'RE DEAD
LUMBERED WITH
HIM, THAT'S FOR
SURE.

BUTTON IT
UP, YOU TWO!
GET DIGGING!



IT WAS LATE THAT NIGHT WHEN A WEARY AND DISPIRITED COMPANY CRAWLED BACK INTO THE BATTALION LINES. HOT TEARS OF HUMILIATION WERE VERY CLOSE TO ALAN NORDAN'S EYES AS HE HEARD THE SARCASTIC REMARKS THAT GREETED THEIR ARRIVAL.

HEY! WHAT HIT YOU
MERCHANTS? BEEN ON A
MYSTERY TOUR?

BELT UP, WILL YER!
IT'S NOT OUR FAULT
WE 'AD TO DIG UP HALF
LIBYA.



Blind Judgment

41

TO ALAN'S SURPRISE, COLONEL STRICKLAND TOOK A FAR MORE LENIENT VIEW THAN HE HAD ANTICIPATED.

THE DESERT'S A CAPRICIOUS OLD VIXEN UNTIL YOU GET TO KNOW HER. NO HARM DONE, MY BOY.

YOUNG NORDAN REALLY IS THE BLUE-EYED BOY. IF ONE OF US HAD...



BUT C. S. M. LAWSON TOOK A DIFFERENT VIEW OF THE MATTER.

COME ON, LAWSON, WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER LONG ENOUGH! WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?



WELL, IT'S — IT'S THE CAPTAIN! HE'S TURNED THE LADS A BIT SOUR, SIR. IT'S WHEN WE BUMP JERRY AGAIN THAT WORRIES ME. ONCE THE MEN HAVE LOST CONFIDENCE...

Blind Judgment

A FROWN PUCKERED THE MAJOR'S FACE AS HE SILENTLY CURSED THE COLONEL FOR ALLOWING SENTIMENT TO BLIND HIS JUDGMENT...



THE MAJOR MADE HIS WAY TO THE COLONEL'S TENT.



AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS, COLONEL STRICKLAND JOINED A CONFERENCE OF SENIOR OFFICERS.



INTENTLY, THEY LISTENED TO THE DETAILED ORDERS FOR THE BATTLE THAT WAS TO PROVE THE TURNING POINT OF THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER, THE NIGHT SKY WAS LIT BY THE MUZZLE FLASHES OF A THOUSAND GUNS. *THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN HAD BEGUN.*



AS THE FULL ORCHESTRA OF THE BOMBARDMENT REACHED ITS CRESCENDO, THE INFANTRY ROSE FROM THE GROUND AND MOVED RESOLUTELY FORWARD.



Blind Judgment

THE 4TH BATTALION WAS IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE SKIRMISHING LINES MOVING STEADILY EASTWARDS. AHEAD LOOMED THEIR OBJECTIVE, AN UGLY OUTCROP OF HIGH LAND THAT DOMINATED THE BRIGADE FRONT.



AS THE BATTALION SURGED FORWARD THEY WERE MET BY A SAVAGE CROSSFIRE FROM THE WELL-SITED GERMAN SPANDAUS ALONG THE CREST.



THE GERMAN MACHINE GUNS TOOK A PITILESS TOLL, BUT THE ATTACKERS ON THE CENTRE AND RIGHT FLANK PRESSED DOGGEDLY UPWARDS.



ON THE LEFT FLANK, ALAN NORDAN LED "B" COMPANY TOWARDS THE EXTREME END OF THE RIDGE.



BUT ALAN'S TORMENTED MIND WAS STILL DWELLING ON THAT FIRST FATEFUL ACTION. AS THE AIR FILLED WITH THE HUNGRY WHINE OF HOT GERMAN LEAD, INSTINCT TOOK OVER FROM COMMONSENSE...



Blind Judgment

FOR A MOMENT, THE COMPANY WAVERED. THE LINE FALTERED AND MEN DIVED FOR COVER.

WE CAN'T STAY
HERE, SIR! WE'VE
GOT TO GET THEM
GOING AGAIN!

I-I CAN'T.
THEY'D BE CUT TO
PIECES!



THE GERMAN MACHINE GUNS WERE USELESS AGAINST THE MAIN WEIGHT OF THE
ATTACK AS IT FLOODED OVER THEM.



THE BATTALION HAD PAID A HIGH PRICE, BUT AT LAST THE REMNANTS OF THREE COMPANIES STOOD FIRMLY ALONG THE RIDGE.



Blind Judgment

THE COLONEL DID NOT WAIT TO HEAR THE SERGEANT-MAJOR FINISH. REGARDLESS OF THE INCREASING DANGER, HE STALKED OVER TO WHERE THE YOUNG CAPTAIN LAY AND HIS VOICE STUNG LIKE ACID . . .



THEN COLONEL STRICKLAND ROUNDED ON THE MEN . . .



NUMB WITH HORROR AND SHAME, ALAN NORDAN WATCHED THE COLONEL FORCE HIS MEN BACK INTO THE ATTACK.



"B" COMPANY FOUGHT GRIMLY UPWARDS TO GAIN ANOTHER FIFTY YARDS. MEN FELL BUT THE REMAINDER KEPT GOING. THEN A STICK GRENADE BURST A FEW YARDS AHEAD OF THE COLONEL.



Blind Judgment

WITH THEIR INSPIRATION GONE, THE MEN DIVED INSTINCTIVELY FOR COVER AGAIN.

ONE MORE RUSH
AND WE'D HAVE MADE
IT, CURSE IT!

ONE MORE RUSH AND
THERE WON'T BE A MAN LEFT
TO GO FORWARD, SIR. HOLD
STILL WHILE I SHOVE THIS
FIELD DRESSING ON.

THEN SOMETHING DEEP WITHIN ALAN NORDAN
STIRRED. AN INHERITANCE OF COURAGE PASSED
DOWN FROM GENERATIONS OF SOLDIERS STIRRED
IN HIS VEINS.

YOU WON'T
BE NEEDING
THIS ANY MORE,
SOLDIER—BUT
I WILL!

A SHADOWY SMILE OF APPROVAL CROSSED THE GAUNT FACE OF MAJOR RITCHIE AS HE SAW THE LONE FIGURE START FORWARD.



ASTONISHED EYES FOLLOWED THE FLYING FIGURE THAT HURLED ITSELF UP THE BULLET-LASHED SLOPE.



Blind Judgment

THE WILDLY ZIG-ZAGGING FIGURE MADE AN ELUSIVE TARGET FOR THE NAZI GUNNERS.



AS THE RANGE CLOSED, THE GERMANS FIRE BECAME WILD AND ERRATIC. BY SOME MIRACLE, NORDAN WAS WITHIN TWENTY YARDS OF THEIR HOT MUZZLES BEFORE THE MAGAZINE ON HIS BREN RAN DRY.





THE NAZI GUNNER TRIGGERED OFF ONE MORE FRANTIC BURST, BUT IT WAS TOO WILD AND TOO LATE.



THE GRENADE EXPLODED WITH A DEADLY EFFECT — SILENCING THE MACHINE GUN POSITION FOREVER...



Blind Judgment

AS THE MURDEROUS CROSSFIRE OF THE GUNS CUT SHORT, A RAGGED CHEER ROSE FROM THE TATTERED RANKS OF 'B' COMPANY.



ALAN NORDAN WAS HARDLY AWARE OF THE CLATTER OF HEAVY BOOTS AS HIS COMPANY SWEEPED PAST HIM.



IN THE FACE OF THE AGGRESSIVE ASSAULT, RESISTANCE ALONG THE RIDGE COLLAPSED.



IN THE SILENCE THAT HAD FALLEN ON THE HILLSIDE, MAJOR RITCHIE MADE HIS WAY SLOWLY BACK TO THE ADVANCED DRESSING STATION, WHERE THE COLONEL WAS HAVING HIS WOUND DRESSED.

IT'S ALL OVER, SIR. THE OBJECTIVE HAS BEEN TAKEN.

I'LL COME AND SEE THE MEN, THEY'VE DONE WELL. BUT NORDAN...



Blind Judgment

LINES OF PAIN AND MISERY WERE ETCHED DEEP INTO THE COLONEL'S FACE.

HAVE CAPTAIN NORDAN
PLACED UNDER CLOSE ARREST,
DON — FOR COWARDICE IN THE
FACE OF THE ENEMY.



ALAN NORDAN
LED THAT LAST CHARGE,
SIR! IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR HIM,
THE COMPANY WOULD NEVER
HAVE MADE IT.

I—I DON'T
UNDERSTAND!



THE MAJOR'S VOICE WAS QUIET AND IT WAS SOME LITTLE WHILE BEFORE THE COLONEL ANSWERED.

YOU TRIED TO MAKE HIM RUN BEFORE HE COULD WALK. HIS FATHER WAS A GOOD OFFICER, BUT HE HAD YEARS OF EXPERIENCE BEHIND HIM. ALAN HAS ONLY JUST STARTED ALONG THE ROAD.

YES, DON, YOU'RE RIGHT. HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN THAT BLIND?



SOME DAY, MAJOR NORDAN WOULD LIVE AGAIN IN HIS SON, BUT IT WOULD TAKE TIME. AT THAT MOMENT, ALAN NORDAN CAME UP...

SIR—I WOULD LIKE TO RELINQUISH COMMAND OF THE COMPANY. I DO NOT FEEL I AM READY...

VERY WELL, ALAN... YOUR TURN WILL COME THOUGH, BEFORE VERY LONG.



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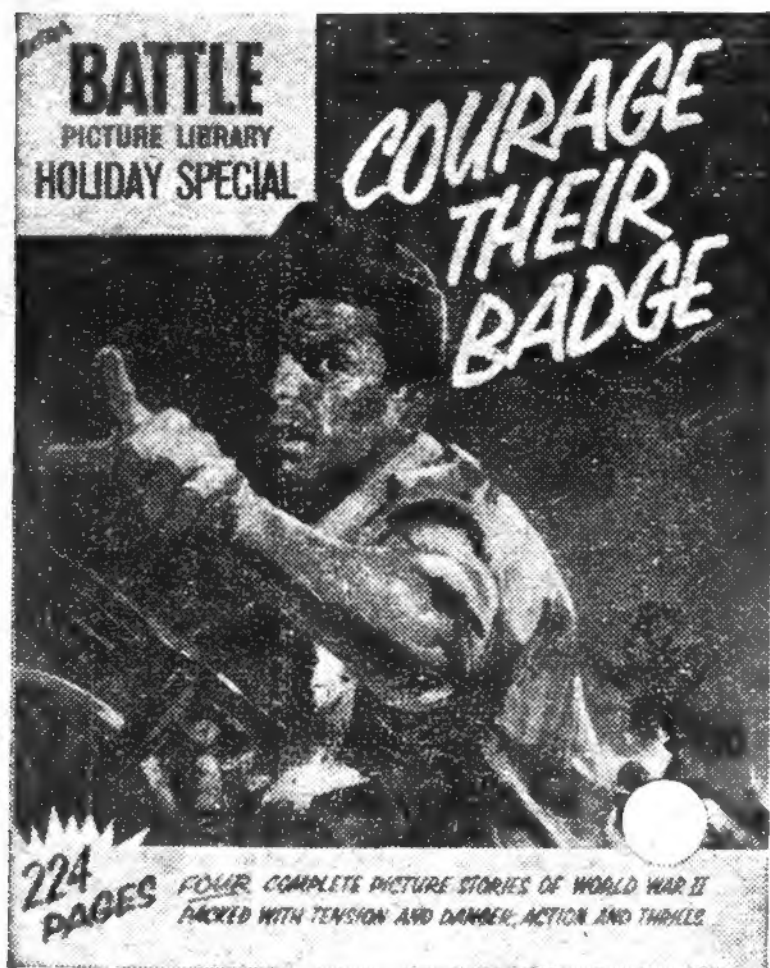
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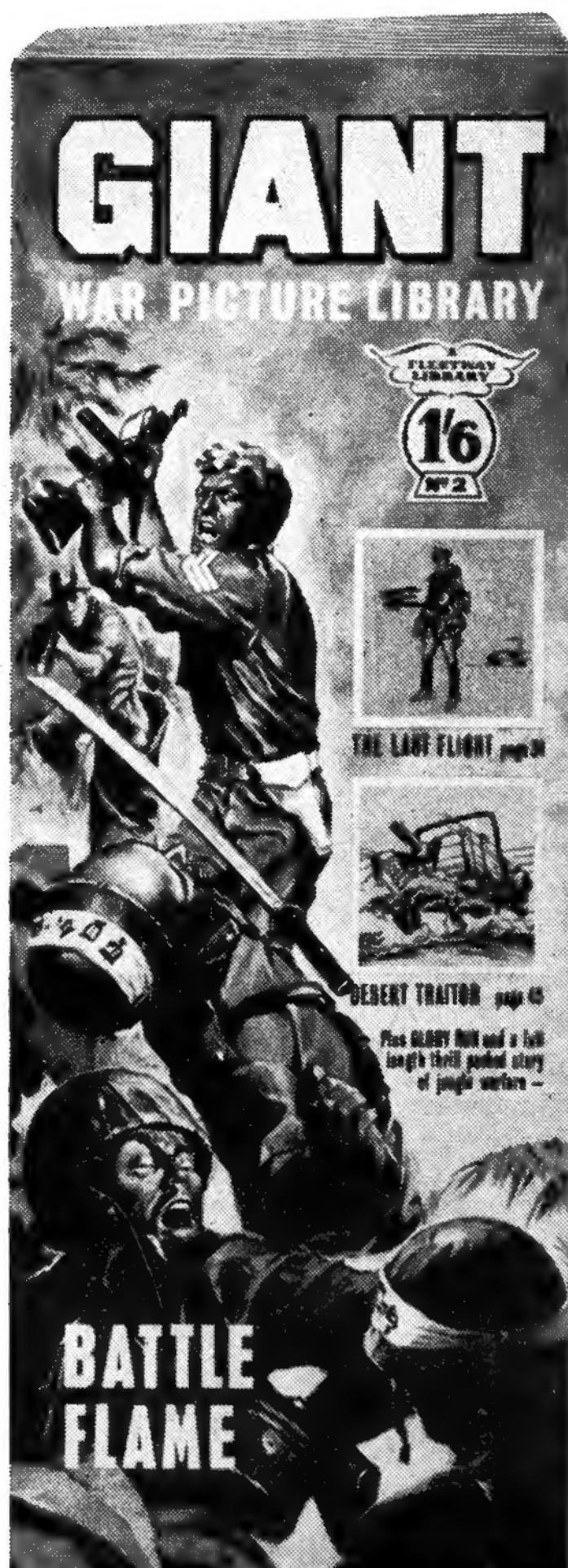


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